

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY



3 9999 06506 075 6

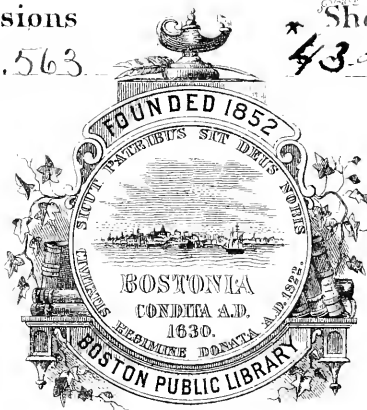
4344.105
no. 1-12

Accessions

391.563

Shelf No

43.44.105

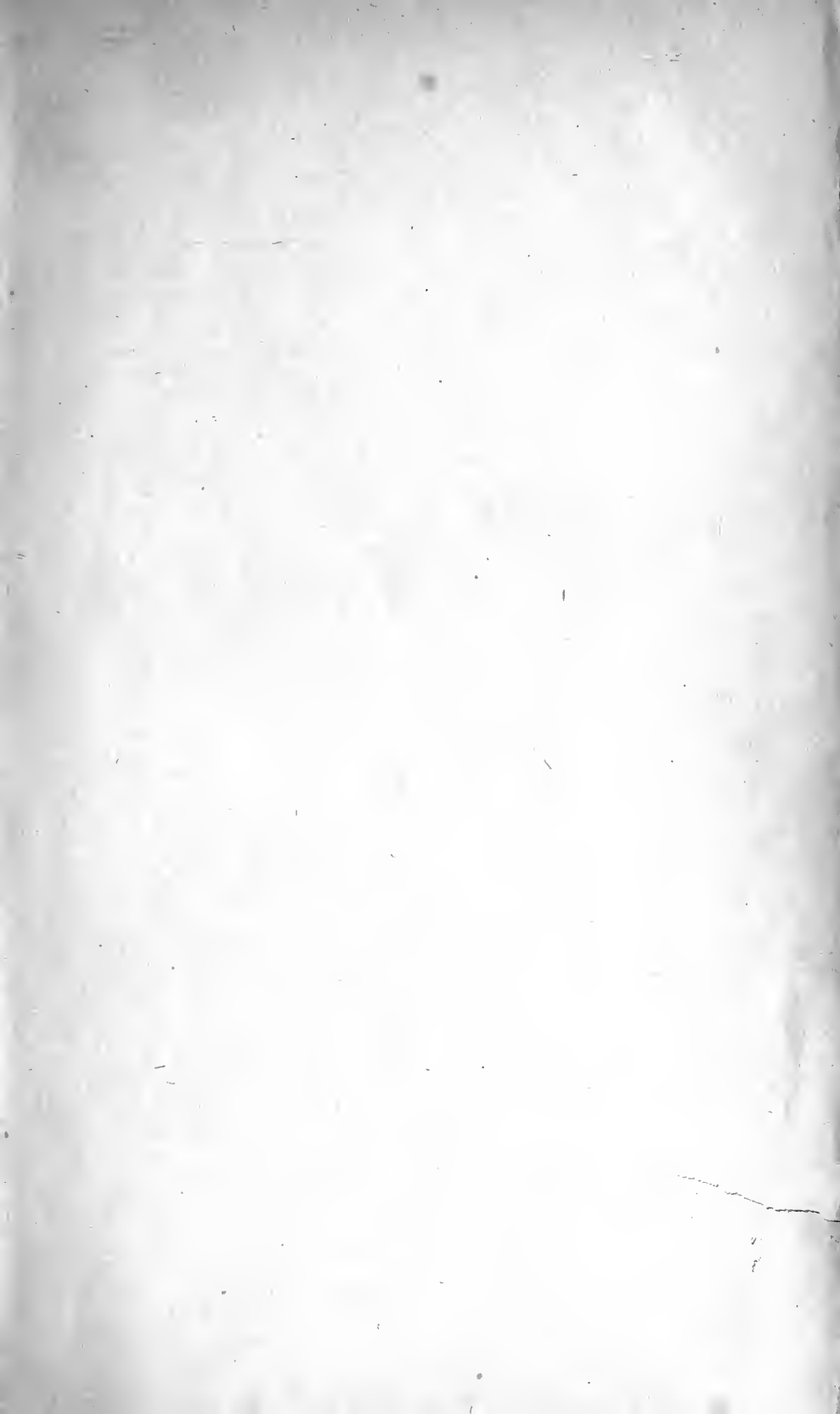


Received.

Jan. 7, 1887.












2669

PAMPHLETS.

*Military
biography.*



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010 with funding from
Boston Public Library

3

SKETCH

— OF —

CAPT. PAUL ROLFE GEORGE.



SKETCH

OF

CAPT. PAUL ROLFE GEORGE

OF

HOPKINTON, N. H.

BY JOHN HATCH GEORGE,
OF CONCORD, N. H.

Concord, N. H.

PRINTED BY THE REPUBLICAN PRESS ASSOCIATION.

1885.

T O

MRS. CAROLINE LIVINGSTON GEORGE,

Whose life for more than twenty-one years has been devotedly faithful to her
husband's memory, this brief sketch is respectfully
dedicated by his brother.

CAPTAIN PAUL ROLFE GEORGE.

The New England of the early part of this century, and its men and events, are naturally subjects of a sort of filial regard to its resident sons, as well as to the men of New England descent in whatever part of this broad land they may be citizens; for New England, to borrow the phrase of Hawthorne, is to all intents and purposes the "Old Home" of a vast fraction of the energetic population of the Western and Middle states. To them it is historic soil, in which lies the dust of their ancestors, and whither they make pilgrimages of sentiment and recreation.

The New England of the first part of this century was a homogeneous community. Its people were mostly of English stock, but with such peculiarities and traits as generations born and reared in a New World environment would naturally take on and exhibit. There was not then the constant intercourse with Europe which is now so seriously sophisticating and affecting a multitude of Americans. In the early part of the century there was the genuine Yankee, pure and simple, the true son of the New World soil. Immigration had not then seriously diluted the population, which was socially, morally, and intellectually of a higher average than any other community ever attained. It is no wonder, then, that this old-fashioned New England and its noteworthy men have become the subjects of so much historic and biographic thought. There were then, indeed, New Englanders who were racy of the soil. Every section of Yankeeland then produced its quota of remarkable charac-

ters who deserved commemoration; for old-fashioned New England was as rich and fertile in its productions of such original characters as Scotland has been at any period of its history.

It is the duty of the ready writers of today to see to it that every such character of native growth shall have its due meed of biographic notice, so that future generations may know what manner of men preceded them on this Novanglian soil, who have made it famous by their genius, thrift, energy, and enterprise.

Prominent in this class of New England men was Captain PAUL ROLFE GEORGE, who was born in Concord, N. H., on the 25th of August, 1807. He was named for Paul Rolfe, son of Benjamin Rolfe, both very prominent citizens in the early days of Concord. The latter married Sarah, eldest daughter of the Rev. Timothy Walker. After his death his widow married Benjamin Thompson, widely known as Count Rumford.

Capt. George's father, John George, Esq., lived in early life in the adjoining town of Hopkinton, where he was born May 26, 1780. His grandfather moved to that town after the middle of the last century from Haverhill, Mass., to which place his ancestors had emigrated from England in the preceding century. Early in the present century, his grandfather, having in 1784 moved to Warner, N. H., located in Topsham, Vt., then a wilderness, with such of a large family as were then too young to be self-supporting. He cleared and subse-

quently cultivated a large farm on what is known as "George's hill," in that town, where he died Feb. 4, 1822. Capt. George's paternal grandmother was the daughter of Captain Harriman, a retired sea captain, who settled in Hopkinton from Salem, Mass., about the time his father came from Haverhill. These ancestors, on both sides, were noted for self-reliance, persistence, and force of character.

Captain George's mother, Ruth Bradley, was a descendant of one of the representative families of the early settlers of Concord, from whom he inherited, with a somewhat delicate constitution, a quickness and brightness of intellect and clearness of perception which became in after-life his almost marvelous characteristics.

His father was from childhood thoroughly self-dependent. Learning the hatters' trade, he followed that vocation through his early life. He was also for many years an innkeeper, a director of a leading bank, a deputy sheriff, an administrator of estates, and a practical farmer, displaying in all his business affairs great energy, fidelity, and unswerving integrity. He had by his first wife three children,—Paul Rolfe, the subject of this sketch, Clarissa Bartlett, wife of Hon. Hamilton E. Perkins, and Susan Emery, who died in early life. By his second wife, Mary Hatch, he had one son, John Hatch, who still resides at the family homestead. He died at Concord, N. H., January 9, 1843.

Captain George was educated in the public schools of Concord, but he was too nervously restive in his boyhood and early youth to devote himself to study. His love of trade, embracing in its subjects his jack-knife, clothing, and boots in daily use, as well as the most valuable property he possessed in after-life, was a passion with him. An intimate friend and associate of his youth says that after he was fifteen years old he had scarcely ever the same suit of

clothes or pair of boots two days in succession. Many ludicrous anecdotes are told of this marked peculiarity, which was apparently founded not so much in a desire for gain as in the love of trade. Among his purchases and swappings before he was twenty-one years of age could be reckoned, besides almost innumerable horses, carriages, and various kinds of other property, an entire circus and its accompanying paraphernalia.

Soon after he came of age he leased the old Columbian, then the most noted hotel in Concord, which he himself kept for a considerable time. His clerk was Nathaniel White, and Charles H. Norton had charge of his stable. The former subsequently became one of the proprietors of the United States & Canada Express, distinguished alike for his great wealth and liberality, while the latter was owner for many years of the principal livery stable in Concord. Messrs. White and Norton were through life intimate friends and neighbors, and it is not exaggeration to say that no two citizens of Concord ever died more generally beloved or more sincerely lamented. Their affection for Captain George was lifelong and unwavering, and was heartily reciprocated.

Soon after the sale of his interest in the Columbian hotel he removed to Lowell, then rapidly growing into importance as the chief manufacturing locality of New England, and there opened a large dry goods store in company with his cousin Charles L. Emery, under the firm name of George & Emery. Subsequently his health began to fail, and he disposed of his store, and by the advice of his physician went South to avert the tendency to pulmonary consumption with which he was seriously threatened, and from which his pluck and will power alone rescued him. He spent several months at Washington, where he made the intimate acquaintance of many men of prom-

innence from all parts of the country. Upon his return he was appointed to a position in the Boston custom-house, under the collectorship of Hon. David Henshaw.

Captain George had a natural taste for politics, and a special love for the excitement incident to political controversy; and the bitter quarrel which followed the veto of the bank charter by President Tyler gave him the special opportunity to display his peculiar power. He became an ardent defender of the president, and the intimate of Caleb Cushing, Henry A. Wise, and other young and vigorous statesmen who constituted what was then known as the Tyler Guard. He was appointed by the president naval store-keeper at Brooklyn, N. Y., a position which he held till his active and openly expressed sympathy with the employes of the navy-yard, in their opposition to an official order that a government vessel should be sent elsewhere for repairs, caused a quarrel with the department which resulted in his removal from office. Subsequently, in company with Caleb Cushing, Robert Rantoul, and a few other intimate friends, he made the journey up the Mississippi river to the present sites of St. Paul and Minneapolis, then a wilderness with scarcely a single white inhabitant. They also visited St. Croix falls, and continued their trip across the country to Lake Superior with the view of making Minnesota their future home. They made large investments in land near St. Croix falls, and sent out quite a number of settlers and agents. The Mexican war breaking out soon after their return to New England, Gen. Cushing was appointed colonel of the Massachusetts regiment, and selected Captain George as his quartermaster. They both served during the war. While they were absent in Mexico their Minnesota property was sadly neglected, and this neglect, coupled with the rapid settlement of the territory and the occupancy by settlers of the pur-

chased lands, caused all sorts of conflicting claims, and rendered the investment an unprofitable one to all concerned, particularly to Gen. Cushing, who retained his landed interest with its annoying burden of litigation to the time of his decease.

After the Mexican war Captain George spent several years in business in New York city. Subsequently he purchased a fine farm on Contoocook river, in Hopkinton, N. H., on the line of the Concord & Claremont Railroad, and about ten miles from Concord. He was very fond of horses and cattle, and specially devoted the next ten years to their care, and to the cultivation and improvement of his farm, which became under his enthusiastic management one of the finest and most productive in the county. He also took a lively and continuous interest in the material improvement, through the development and utilization of its water-power, of the village near which his farm is located; and in this respect he was doubtless the most enterprising citizen of the town.

In 1855 he married Caroline, only daughter of William Livingston, of Lowell, Mass., and she still remains his widow. He left no children. Mr. Livingston, as a merchant and business man, had few equals in activity, energy, and success. The same year, 1855, Captain George represented Hopkinton in the state legislature, and later travelled over Europe with his wife, leisurely visiting the principal cities and other localities of special interest.

Upon the breaking out of the civil war in 1861 he brought his large military experience in the Mexican war to the aid of the state in fitting out the early New Hampshire regiments, which it is believed went to the war unsurpassed in the thoroughness of their outfit.

Captain George had from early manhood been an intimate friend of Gen. Butler's. They had for years lived side by side at

Lowell, and years of friendship ripened into mutual confidence, love, and admiration. Captain George believed unreservedly, with an unwavering conviction, in Gen. Butler's genius and ability in all respects civil and military; and in Gen. Butler's view his friend had no superior in brains and executive force. Captain George was especially anxious for the independent command subsequently given the general in the authority to raise the New England division, and was vigorously active in assisting, by suggestion and otherwise, in securing it from President Lincoln. Upon his appointment as general of this division Gen. Butler selected Capt. George as his quartermaster, whose experience, faithfulness, and executive capacity enabled him to fit out the expedition to New Orleans with an unprecedented thoroughness and alacrity. Probably no disappointment of Gen. Butler's life exceeded that caused by the personal ill-feeling on the part of a prominent politician which prevented Captain George's official confirmation, and thus deprived him of the aid and services of the man whom, of all others, he desired by his side in the trying ordeal through which he was passing.

General Butler, in a recent letter to the writer, says,—

My early acquaintance with Captain George ripened into the closest intimacy. Being some ten or twelve years older than myself, I was accustomed to listen to his suggestions in political and business matters with the utmost deference. I only enunciate a simple truth when I say, that during a long acquaintance with the most prominent men of the country, I have never met any man with a mind so inventive, so full of resources as to every phase of political and business life, so thoroughly discriminating as to facts and theories, and so thoroughly capable of distinctive appreciation of the capabilities, powers, and abilities of public men. His comprehension on all these subjects was intuitive, and an ex-

perience of more than twenty years since his death has confirmed his judgment in every case within my knowledge. He entered the Mexican war as a quartermaster of volunteers. He so thoroughly won his way by his business tact and energy, that upon the capture of the city of Mexico General Scott selected him as the controlling quartermaster at his head-quarters—a position never given before to a volunteer officer, and hardly since. When President Lincoln gave me authority to raise troops in New England to form part of the expedition which resulted in the capture of New Orleans, I was exceedingly anxious that Captain George should be its quartermaster. Being then of independent fortune, and advanced in years, I doubted his acceptance of the position. His love of country and his personal friendship, at my earnest solicitation, moved him so to do. He entered upon that duty with the vigor and enthusiasm of youth. From that hour I had personally no concern with any detail as to the supplies of every description so important to the success of the enterprise. Captain George did it all. He was so wonderfully faithful, and had such comprehension of the needs, that I venture to say there was never another military expedition so thoroughly fitted in every part with all needed supplies. When I sailed for Ship Island I left Captain George in New England, that he might settle his numerous accounts, to come later, and bring with him the remainder of our supplies. In my absence his name came up for confirmation before the senate. Owing to some political feeling between him and a senator from his state, he failed of confirmation. I was therefore left at Ship Island without any quartermaster, save a young regimental one, who probably never had seen a quartermaster's return; and so I was acting quartermaster of the division for some three months, till after the capture of New Orleans. After Captain George's death it became necessary that I should take part in settling his final accounts with the department, and thus I became acquainted with the great accuracy with which he kept his accounts.

Captain George had a very sympathetic heart. He was greatly beloved by all the fellow-members of the staff, and especially by all the officers of the division. I mourned his death with as deep grief as any one could, save a wife, child, or brother.

Upon the completion of the outfit and the departure of the division for New Orleans, Captain George returned to his farm, which became the Mecca of prominent men from all sections of the country, where he dispensed a lavish hospitality.

Early in the year 1864 he spent several weeks with his brother at the old family homestead, visiting the friends and associates of his boyhood and youth. It was his farewell visit to his birthplace. Soon after his return home he was taken suddenly ill, and on the 29th of February he closed a life of constant activity, at his farm in Hopkinton, surrounded by his relatives and friends, in the 57th year of his age. He was buried in the family lot, in Blossom Hill cemetery, in Concord, where a fine granite monument marks his resting-place.

Such is a brief account of the life, and some of its incidents, of the subject of this sketch. It will be seen that Captain George's career was a checkered and varied one, full of the variety of pursuit, speculative ventures, and political incident which mark the career of an able and energetic American during the period in which he lived. But, after all, he was chiefly interesting on his own personal account, and for himself, for he was, in his psychological organization, a man of genius. He had an element of striking individuality which differentiated him from everybody else. There was no mistaking him for any other person than himself. His conversational powers were remarkable, and as a talker on the current men and politics of his time he could not be surpassed. His talk was like the effervescence of champagne. It sparkled with wit, sarcasm, and irony.

But he was not merely an eloquent and most interesting talker. He was full of practical sense and knowledge, the result of a life's experience in both peace and war. He was the intimate friend and associate of such

remarkable public men as Franklin Pierce, Wm. L. Marcy, Caleb Cushing, Levi Woodbury, Robt. Rantoul, David K. Cartter, Henry A. Wise, Isaac Hill, and B. F. Butler; and it is not too much to say, that though they were his superiors in reputation and in social and political influence, they were under special obligations to him for suggestions and advice which his almost intuitive knowledge of the state of public feeling at any given emergency enabled him to give, and which they fully appreciated. He was in every way qualified to be the "guide, philosopher, and friend" of great political and party leaders, for he thoroughly understood the varying moods of the people, being a man of the people himself. He was not debarred from popular intercourse by too much personal greatness and conceit of himself. His wit and brilliant conversational powers made him a favorite in all places of popular resort: thus he knew the masses from his own knowledge, and not at second-hand.

A list of his lifelong friends and associates will best convey a proper idea of the appreciation and estimation in which he was held by those intimate with him. In addition to the distinguished men already mentioned, the late Theodore H. Sweetser may be instanced, who, in his day, had no superior at the Massachusetts bar. Mr. Sweetser's face was wont to be lighted up with a glow of pleasure whenever Captain George was a visitor at his office. He would listen with delight while the Captain indulged in his brilliant arrow-flights of comment on current men and events, if he happened to be in one of his effervescent moods, which, indeed, constituted his normal mental state.

Richard S. Spofford, of Newburyport, himself also a man of brilliant intellect, and therefore well qualified to appreciate intellectual brilliancy in his associates, cherishes the memory of his whilom friend, Captain

George, with peculiar tenacity and warmth of recollection and regard.

Among his intimate friends still living, whose youthful recollections of Captain George are cherished with special tenacity, the names of Charles Levi Woodbury of Boston, Sidney Webster of New York, and Daniel S. Richardson of Lowell,—all representative men of marked capacity,—should not be omitted.

Among his friends and associates, who like himself have departed to that "still country whither all are bound," may be mentioned Charles H. Peaslee, member of congress, and Ira Perley, chief-justice, of New Hampshire;—James S. Whitney, remarkable for his political as well as business capacity; the genial and witty Isaac O. Barnes, whose intimacy with Captain George left a doubt in the minds of their personal friends which excelled in brilliancy of conversational powers; Tappan Wentworth, prominent as a lawyer and a member of congress; and Fisher A. Hildreth, the cool, philosophic politician—all of Massachusetts.

Captain George's life covered a period of

only fifty-seven years, but it was a most eventful one in the history of the country. He was born in the administration of Thomas Jefferson, and died during that of Abraham Lincoln. When he reached his majority, John Quincy Adams was in the White House. Meantime in his childhood had occurred the War of 1812 with Great Britain. He began to take a personal interest in political affairs during the administrations of Jackson and Van Buren; but during the administration of John Tyler he was himself a power in federal politics. He lived to see the agitation of the slavery question culminate in a gigantic civil war, near the close of which he ended his career. The United States, as it was in the early part of his life, is now a tradition; for what may be called the better and purer as well as the younger days of the great republic were over in 1845. We are as a nation unspeakably greater, richer, and more populous and powerful than we then were; but greatness of wealth and power is by no means synonymous with popular happiness and national honor.



